

Tutoring Jane Hopper by eliask

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Summary: El is going to need some help before she can start high school next year. A lot of help. Luckily, she has a few friends willing to step up to the plate.

1. The Letter

Chief Jim Hopper came in through the police station. "Flo," he called by way of greeting.

"Chief," she called. The secretary waved a small envelope in her hand. "I have something for you."

Hopper picked it up, staring at the return address. His hands began to shake.

"Everything all right?" Florence asked, filing her nails.

"Yeah, yeah," Hopper said, staring the envelope, turning back towards the hall.

He made his way to his office and shut the door. He rummaged through his desk, reaching for his letter opener, and paused. Eyes shifting. He stood up and closed the blinds. Couldn't be too careful. Hopper then returned to his seat and began to open the letter. There were five papers enclosed, each folded in thirds.

Hopper paused again. There was a bit of perspiration collecting on the back of his neck. He went back out into the hall, opened the office fridge, and freed a beer from a six-pack. Then, clutching the beer, he went back to his desk, sat down, and smoothed out the first paper. He cleared his throat, and began to read:

Hawkins Board of Education

Academic Achievement Assessment

Jane Hopper – age 13

Reading - 37%

Writing - 20%

Math - 32%

Science - 41%

Score Breakdown:

READING

Vocabulary – 30%

Reading Comprehension – 45%

WRITING

Grammar – 20%

Analysis – 20%

MATH

Systems of Equations – 21%

Problem solving – 32%

Data Analysis – 35%

Algebra – 20%

SCIENCE

Data Representation– 70%

Research Summaries -23%

As compared to other students:

Reading – 4th grade level

Writing –2nd grade level

Math – 3rd grade level

Science – 4th grade level

Hopper set the papers down with a sigh and popped open the beer. He took a swig, and then another.

What were they going to do? Start the kid off in third grade? Second grade? El was turning fourteen at the end of the year. Hopper had promised her something like a normal life. And dammit, he was going to give that to her. Hopper picked up the papers – and crumpled them. He threw them in the trash. He reached for his phone, and waited.

She picked up on the third ring. He cleared his throat. "Mrs. Wheeler? This is Chief Hopper, Chief of Police. I need to ask you a favor..."

2. Science

Mike Wheeler tugged off one glove and knocked. And knocked. Just as El had shown him. He heard the door unlock, his breath fogging up around his face as he grinned in anticipation.

Three hundred and fifty three days. That's how long he had waited for this girl. How many times he had called her. Throughout that time, he hadn't known she'd been hidden away in this cabin. Now that he did, he fully expected to make up for that lost time. As much as Hopper allowed.

The door swung open, but it wasn't El. It was Hopper, and he was holding a gun. "El's gone," he growled.

"*What?!*" Mike exclaimed. "But she - isn't she supposed to be-"

"Get in here." Hopper pulled Mike in through the front door, muttering something and cocking his gun.

Mike's head was swirling. *Gone?* Again? But they been through so much. He was going to tutor her. They were going to start high school together. And El, El didn't deserve this. She needed a break. She-

"Mike!"

Mike turned around at the familiar voice and the next thing he knew, she was running towards him, tackling him into a hug.

Hopper chuckled. "Just messing with you, kid."

Mike's heart was still beating too fast. "Hopper," he said questioningly, holding her tightly, his chin just grazing the top of her curly head..

El pulled back from the hug, eyes glittering. "Punked," she said.

Mike pulled out the supplies from his backpack and lay them on the table. Hopper whistled. "Nice going."

Mike nodded in acknowledgement. "It's all Mr. Clarke." He turned to El. "So we have notebooks, pencils, all the ingredients, Ziplocks, gloves, goggles, magnifying glasses, petri dishes, and these stick things, uh, cotton swabs. You ready?"

El nodded seriously and took his hand.

Mike felt his cheek grow warm. He looked pointedly away from Hopper, keeping El's gaze. "Let's do this."

Hopper retired to the couch, pulling out a newspaper, as they raided the kitchen for supplies. They were already wearing their oversized goggles and surgical gloves. Though only after they had first experimented with the sound the gloves made as they stretched the plastic and released it so it slapped back on their skin. El seemed to think Mike look very amusing in his get-up, and he flicked an extra glove at her. But they had business to do.

They looked over the list.

"Stock powder?"

"Got it."

"Gelatin?"

"Mr. Clarke has us covered."

"Sugar?"

Mike slammed the sugar bowl down on the counter.

"Measuring cups?"

The ones they needed were on a shelf neither of them could reach, and as Hopper looked very comfortable reading on the couch, El levitated them down until they sat by the other ingredients.

And they began.

Carefully, they poured water into a saucepan, and turned on the stove. While they waited for it to boil, Mike took out his deck of

cards as El taught him a new game. Then they added the stock powder, sugar, and gelatin and stirred. As it cooked, they went back to the card game, and then they started taking extra gloves from the box, filling them with tap water, tying them, and placing them in the freezer, or simply taking picking one up and blowing it up with air like balloons. They then went back to the stovetop and took the saucepan off the heat. They used a spoon to pour some of the mixture into the petri dishes, and then they returned the petri dishes to the refrigerator.

While waiting for the mixture to gel and cool, the next few happy hours were spent around the perimeter of the cabin. Though they were always under Hopper's watch, Mike was relieved that he was content to watch from a short distance away, rather than following them around everywhere, as he might have expected. Hopper was still very protective of El, especially when it came to her leaving the confines of the cabin. However, Mike had convinced him that to be an effective science tutor, they would have to do some hands-on fieldwork.

Mike and El inspected the area around the cabin as much as they could. They each pointed out animal tracks and Mike identified the species of trees he knew, and they listened to bird calls and animal sounds. Mike identified a few, and soon El was picking them out, too. They each marked them down in their notebooks, sketching whenever they could.

They picked up the few remaining fallen leaves, examining them closely and running their fingers over the fragile, dehydrated veins, taking care not to crack them. They talked about photosynthesis and how that sustained the different plants around them.

When they both started to become chilled, the three of them returned indoors. Mike and El removed their winter clothes, and then with relish, put their plastic gloves and goggles back on. Now the real fun could begin.

"I'll take the toilet," Max said gamely, peering at her through the goggles. Though they were too big for his face, they somehow still pinched his nose.

El nodded seriously. "I'll do the doorknob." They separated solemnly, each taking out a q-tip and swabbing the areas in question with not a little enthusiasm.

Quickly, so as not to contaminate the samples, they each swabbed their respective q-tip into the prepared petri dishes, closed them, labelled them, and set them down on the counter. To wait.

Mike turned to El. "So, I'll come by tomorrow to see how the bacteria spores are forming?" *Smooth.*

"Nope." They both turned around, and Mike started to appreciate what tall man Hopper was. Recent growth spurt or not, he still had to crane up his head. "Five days."

"*What,*" Mike exclaimed. "But how will we take field notes? We need to see how the samples develop. Then we can make graphs and chart its growth! If you want her to learn science - real science - these experiments aren't enough. We have to follow through with the data"

Hopper examined the boy's face, and sighed. "I read the manual, too, kid. The spores just don't grow that fast. Not on the counter. We don't have that fancy thingamajig you used in school, and I doubt Mr. Clarke would be so casual about handing that out. Come by again in five days. And we'll talk."

Mike struggled for a second, before he seemed to recognize this was the best offer he was going to get. He turned to El slowly. Leaving her was always hard.

But she was staring at Hopper. "Promise?" she asked.

Hopper groaned. "Jesus, not this *promise* thing again."

El leaned forward, palms digging into the table. "Promise he can come back?" He could swear he could hear something shaking. "*Promise?*"

Hopper shook his head, sitting down in one of the kitchen chairs so his eyes were level with hers. "No, I'm not doing this 'friends don't lie' thing anymore - cuz guess what, kiddo?" He glared at her. "I'm not your friend. I'm your legal *dad*. And no promises."

The two stared at each other in an apparent stalemate.

Mike broke the silence. "I'll see you again soon, El."

She turned her gaze on him. "Promise?"

Their separation was still fresh enough that the phrase wasn't yet a familiar game between them. But he knew, now more than ever, that they'd always return to one another. "Promise."

3. D&D Tutors

Hopper was trying to take a nap. However, that was difficult with all the shouting. As was becoming an increasingly regular occurrence, there was a pack of kids in his kitchen. A very loud pack of kids. Giving up on the nap, he sat up in bed, glaring at the door, and the raucous noises coming from behind it. Shuffling forward, he opened his bedroom door, amplifying the sound of Mike's narration.

They were crouched over the board, all eyes on Mike. "The Party enters the cave. In the back of the cave, they find a chest."

The four of them looked around at each other.

"I say we open it," Lucas said, reaching for the dice.

"It's a trap!" Dustin shouted, banging his fist on the table and making the board jump up.

"Aw, you messed up the configuration of the board!

"And *you're* trying to get us into a trap! Don't you remember what happened last time when we were in this situation?"

"You're such a pussy, Dustin!"

"I'm just pointing out, it's not about you. It's about the *welfare* of all party members. And personally, I do not want to walk into another trap."

"While the party conferred," Mike narrated, "Imps attack!"

"Shit shit shit," Dustin swore. "Will, roll, get us out of here!"

Will shook the die and everyone watched as it hit the board. 2.

Moans all around.

Mike had a lousy poker face. "You are imprisoned by Imps."

"Dustin this is all your fault!" Lucas shouted.

"Oh, it's *my* fault now? You think opening the chest would have saved us from an Imp attack? Bullshit."

"Quiet!" El yelled.

They'd been going at this for three hours already.

Hopper took the opportunity to cut in. "Hey, just butting in. How long is this...game going to take?"

"Until the campaign is finished," Mike said innocently, looking out from behind. "Sorry, Chief, but we're a little busy now."

"You're in my house, and you're answering my questions. How long?" Hopper pressed.

The five of them looked at one another and then back to Hopper. "Probably five more hours," Dustin estimated. "Maybe six. We're not talking about tying loose ends here, Chief. We have a whole *adventure* in front of us."

"We haven't even killed anyone yet," Will said reasonably.

Hopper sighed, loudly, pinching his brow. "I get this is...fun, whatever. Can you explain how is this teaching her...anything?"

"It's like we told you Chief." Lucas swiveled around in his chair, non-sense. "There's a lot of math. Arithmetic math. Multiplying, adding, subtraction, fractions. The more times you roll a die, the more math you do. It's not high level stuff, but she'll have the basics down pat. She'll be ready for anything, Algebra, Geometry, you name it."

"And there's a ton of reading," Dustin pointed out. He picked up the handbook and waved it in the air. "This is three hundred pages, Chief. And these character sheets? That's a shit-ton of writing right there. You write like an essay each time. You can learn stuff about the Middle Ages, too, if you pay attention. And about fantasy. It inspires you to read. Like *The Hobbit*."

"What is with you and *The Hobbit*?" Lucas said.

"It's a classic novel!"

"It's a children's book!"

"We make her read everything out loud," Mike added, talking over them. "Even the stuff that isn't important. Like the instructions. Every time she reads a new word she has to write it in her flashcard pile. Look how many words we've added."

El patted the pile of flashcards next to her encouragingly. It *was* bigger than it had been this morning.

"You learn teamwork, too. And she has to talk a lot. Communication is key to a successful campaign," Will put in. "And ethics. You have to think about what's right, and what's best for the party. And it's not always the same thing. You have to really think about that."

"Logic is important, also," Lucas threw out. "It's all problem-solving. And tactical thinking. Like in the army. You have to advocate for your troops."

"Roleplaying," Dustin added. "What if, in high school, El wants to join theater? That practice starts here. Where else can she pretend to be a rogue elf?"

"It's basically the most educational game there is," Mike shrugged.

El shrugged, smiling softly. "It's fun."

Hopper grunted. "Well keep at it," he muttered, "And make sure you're eating something besides chips and Eggos." He retreated back to his room, unwilling to admit just how much El's one admission that she was having fun tipped his decision in favor of more D&D sessions.

4. PE

El stepped out of the car, blinking into the harsh sunlight. She turned back around. Hopper had already laid out the ground rules. She was allowed outside for *two hours unsupervised* – if you didn't count Steve. If anything went wrong...well, they were hoping nothing would go wrong. Dr. Owen had given her a year, and today she was nearly at the six-month mark. Everyone – everyone meaning Hopper and Joyce, or Hopper after Joyce had convinced him it was all right – had decided she needed to celebrate.

Sure, she might have chosen to *celebrate* with *Mike* by *going out* somewhere, preferably *out of Hawkins*, maybe into town, maybe to Chicago. Instead, the adults in her life had decided she was celebrating her short-lived freedom with...Steve. Just Steve.

El had met Steve at the Byers' a few months back. The first thing she'd noticed about him was that he had a lot of hair. On that occasion he'd dropped by to drive Dustin back home. "It's fine," he'd waved his hand. "It's on my way anyway. Now come on you shithhead." Steve was Jonathan's age, but they didn't look like they were friends. After he and Dustin had left, the others had whispered the explanation. Steve used to date Nancy, Mike's sister, but now Nancy was with Jonathan, Will's brother. Despite that and the age difference, Steve had actually become pretty good friends with The Party. El also knew that if Hopper was letting her spend time with him *alone, outside*, Hopper must trust him, too. Now it was El's turn to befriend him.

Mike had been upset, as she had been, that they weren't allowed to spend her first two hours outside unsupervised (if you didn't count Steve) without him. "She'll be with Steve," he had argued. "She'll be supervised!"

"That blows," Lucas had commiserated. "But Steve's all right. Just think in a few months we'll be starting high school together. Hopper and Joyce can't breathe down your neck there. Or if they do, it'll be really weird. It's just a little more time."

Dustin hadn't seen the problem. "Can I come?"

The worst part of it was that even though Hopper had told her this was a celebration, of sorts, it was still more tutoring. Just tutoring of a different kind. "It'll be fun," Hopper had said.

From inside the car, Hopper saluted her, and then again, this time to Steve. "I'll be back here in exactly two hours. Be safe," he told them.

"Not stupid!" she chanted back. He cracked a smile and sped off.

El turned around. Steve bounded toward her, balancing an orange ball with black stripes in his hand. They were in some kind of court with long poles at either end, and on the top of the poles were white hoops. The court was green asphalt but drawn along it were white concentric half-circles that seemed to separate the two poles from each other. She frowned. She knew she'd seen this configuration on TV before, but she couldn't place a name to the scene.

"Hey there," Steve said. He was wearing long blue shorts and a green t-shirt. "Ready for some basketball?"

Basketball. That was the word. Her hand went to her vocabulary pile, only to find her pocket empty. Right, she'd left it at the cabin. Hopper had said she'd earned a break.

She saw Steve's face fall slightly. Shoot, she was taking too long to respond. "Yes," she said.

"Great!" he enthused. "Catch." He threw the ball towards her.

"Oh," Steve said. "I see why Hopper wanted you to have some practice."

She frowned at him. "Why are you throwing that at me?"

Steve's eyes were wide.

Staring at the ball frozen in the air between them.

"See that's the thing," he finally said. "People are going to throw balls at you. I mean, figuratively, but also literal balls. In high school,

you're going to have to take this class called PE. It stands for physical education. A lot of people don't like it, but," he shrugged modestly. "I'm pretty good at it. Anyway, in PE, you have to do all these physical activities. Running, push ups, basketball, soccer, softball. If you're really good, you can join a team. But before you can do that, you're going to have to play basketball with me for two hours without using your powers. Cuz if you pull a move like this in class you're gonna freak the shit out of everyone in the room. And then...well, we *do not* want that to happen. Got it?"

She liked that he didn't sugar coat it for her. "Got it."

"And uhh," he gestured in between them. "If you could make that ball drop down or something. It's kinda, you know. Conspicuous. I can hear someone coming."

She could hear it, too. A skateboarder, and it sounded like he was heading in their direction. "Oh." The ball dropped down to the asphalt, bouncing up and down until Steve grabbed it again. In her defense, it had been a while since she'd been outside anywhere besides for the Byers' house or the area immediately outside the cabin. It had been a long time since she'd been around anyone who didn't already know about her abilities.

"Start over?" Steve offered. He threw the ball towards her and this time she caught it in her hands. "Okay," he said. "Progress." Then something caught his eye and he scowled, turning around. "What are you doing here?" he said, sounding less stern and more resigned.

Max Mayfield zoomed closer. When she was right beside them, she somehow jumped right off her skateboard in such a way that it landed tucked right under her arm. "I heard you were playing basketball," she said. She wasn't even out of breath. "Want another player?"

Steve raised his eyebrows. "Did Hop send you?"

"No," Max said pointedly. With her free hand, she brushed the hair from her eyes. "But I want to play."

"Jesus." Steve took a step back and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"We're not really playing. We're learning some basics and making sure she doesn't use her powers."

"Well," Max said, not backing down. "I want to help."

Steve let out a long sigh. "Fine. Another person is probably good anyway. Plus he knows you. You're in this mess already."

El had something else on her mind. "Can you teach me how to skateboard?" she said.

"No, no, no. We are doing basketball because that is what your dad, who is also the chief of police, is paying me to teach you."

Max's eyes glittered. "Yeah. I can."

Steve rolled his eyes upwards. It really was a beautiful day in May. Hardly any clouds. Birds chirping, green trees beyond the court, lots of flowers. School was almost over, and then it was just the summer before The Rest of His Adult Life. No one said being a high school senior was easy.

These kids, though. What was he going to do with these little shits?

"Just try it. Just jump."

El stood on the skateboard, feeling very worried. It had looked a lot easier when Max did it.

"Can't be harder than closing that gate." El couldn't tell if Max was encouraging her or goading her. Regardless, she was right. El jumped up...and the board slid out from under her. Before she could fall to the ground, the skateboard zoomed right back securely under her feet. She smiled proudly at her audience.

Max and Steve were frowning. "Did you cheat?" Steve asked.

"It happened so fast I can't tell," Max said. She shook her head and looked back at El. Her face was set. "Again."

"Foot on the nose, just barely," Max directed. El stuck out the her foot to the top of the board. "Now take the tiniest hop. *There* you go!" The skateboard flipped around, and she was still on it. She hadn't fallen, and she hadn't used her powers. She skated a while farther before kicking the board up, making it stick like Max had showed her, and then leaning her weight on the other side. Using her bottom foot closest to the ground, she started to spin the board again.

Well, she started to. This time, when the skateboard went flying out from under, she went flying too.

"El!" Max and Steve called.

She started picking herself up, aware something was bleeding. Her hands were, for sure. "I did it," she said in triumph. "I didn't make the board go back under me."

Steve offered her a hand, and she grabbed onto it. Her hand stung. "Yeah, but that doesn't mean we want you getting hurt!"

El shrugged, brushing the dirt off from under her chin. Blood never bothered her. "It's like you said," she said plainly. "I'm going to have to learn how to be in class where I can't use my powers."

In many ways, that really was the trade-off. She had two options. She could use her powers relatively freely, keep a small but committed group of friends, but otherwise be forced into hiding and seclusion. (No matter what Kali said, that was the kind of life her sister led.) The other option was learning to control the impulse so that she could attend school, and someday truly venture out into the world. She knew what she was choosing.

"Even when it's hard not to," Max said in understanding. "Like if you get knocked down."

Right. She saw now that if she was playing, say, soccer, and someone kicked her over...well, it would be hard not to retaliate in ways she was sure the ref wouldn't have accounted for.

"Come on, where are you bleeding?" Steve pressed. He reached an arm over her shoulder as though to invite El to lean on him. She just

stared at him curiously. "Let's head to my car. I got a first aid kit."

Max had already hopped back on the skateboard. "Seriously? You're such a nerd."

Steve was so used to this shit from Max he barely reacted. If he had actually been a nerd, he might have gotten into college early decision. "No, I've been babysitting you assholes. You learn to be prepared."

They'd almost made it to the curb when they heard a car pull up and turned around. Too late. Hopper got out of the car and made a beeline for the three of them. "What's going on here?" he said. "Why are you bleeding?"

"I was teaching her how to skate," Max owned up immediately.

Hopper crouched down, inspecting his daughter. He stood up, apparently satisfied. To their surprise, he didn't look upset. "How was it?" he asked El.

El grinned broadly. "Bitchin'," she said.

Hopper looked totally unsurprised that Max was there too, and Steve started to relax. Maybe they weren't in trouble. "How's she doing?" he asked them.

Max and Steve looked between each other. "We didn't actually get to basketball," Steve admitted.

"She's pretty good on the board," Max said. "But she could be better."

Hopper studied El's face. Whatever he saw there, he seemed to like it. "Next Wednesday, the courts off of Loch Nora. We'll see you there." To El, he said, his voice softening, "It's almost summer. It's good to be outside, kid."

They sped off, leaving Max and Steve alone. Steve had never spent much time with either El or Max before. It had been kind of fun, even with Max's attitude. El learned fast, and her special abilities definitely made things interesting. She didn't talk much, and she was kind of intense, but she seemed like a sweet kid. This "tutoring" gig wasn't

half bad.

Max whipped around. "You have a car?"

"Yeah, I have a car," he said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Well it *was*. He was *Steve Harrington*. Of course he had a car.

"Want to...?"

"Oh no."

"Please. My step-dad will kill me."

Steve's eyes moved from her to her skateboard and then back. "How'd you get to these courts anyway?" Hopper had chosen the place because it was far out and generally not a popular hangout.

"Nancy drove me," she shrugged.

"*Nancy* was here?"

"She cares about El, too."

Well, she didn't care about *Steve*. She hadn't even stopped to say hi. One year of dating and then nothing. "Get in. Don't make it a habit, Mayfield." She ran around to the passenger side.

A foggy memory...bleeding in the backseat...a small redhead at the wheel, barely reaching the headrest, let alone the gas pedal. "Can't you drive?" he asked.

"Is that an offer?"

"Shut up and sit down." Though he was honor bound to kvetch some more, the truth was, he really didn't mind.